

BRI at 10: Some Hits and Misses

Table Of Contents

1. Abstract	1
2. Introduction	2
3. China's Ambitious Path	2
4. Viewing through Indo-Pacific lens	5
5. India's View on BRI	6
6. BRI @ 10: Performance Report	8
7. China's Economic Concerns	11
8. Challenges Ahead	15
9. Way Forward	16
10. Conclusion	18
11. References	19

1. Abstract

This paper looks at the transformative journey of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since its inception in 2013. With a budget exceeding \$1 trillion, the BRI has redefined global geopolitics, connecting over 70 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania.¹ In addition to economic growth, BRI influences global supply chains, asserts technological dominance, and targets Eurasian trading markets. For a decade, it has contributed to global growth, economic growth, green energy, and infrastructure networks. The paper examines strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific, highlights China's military rise, and highlights economic concerns such as the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka advocating solutions for development sustainable means, and takes Japan's infrastructure policy and explores global options. Providing a comprehensive analysis, the paper offers important insights for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders in the evolving international network. India's strategy includes leveraging China's investments and ensuring national security through global cooperation and consensus building among stakeholders for the success of the BRI.

¹ [Wharton Upenn](#)

2. Introduction

China's BRI has significantly reshaped the global geopolitical landscape since its inception in 2013. It includes a wide array of projects, ranging from transportation and energy infrastructure to the development of ports, railways, oil and gas pipelines, and power grids, as well as plans for new economic corridors. The overarching goal of this initiative is to revitalize the historical Silk Road, forging economic ties and fostering development among participating nations across Eurasia and Africa.² Two speeches by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 set the stage for the BRI project, emphasizing the need for closer economic ties, cooperation, and the expansion of development space in the Eurasian region.³ The scale of the BRI's influence is not to be underestimated, as it now involves 147 countries, encompassing two-thirds of the world's population and 40 percent of global GDP.⁴

While celebrated for promoting peace and cooperation, the BRI has faced criticism, notably for alleged "debt-trap diplomacy"⁵ in African projects. Some view the initiative as an assertion of China's growing global power, with concerns raised about its true intentions. The United States, skeptical of Beijing's actions, expressed apprehensions about regional development and military expansion implications. India remains cautious, refraining from endorsing the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative as a "national Chinese initiative."⁶

3. China's Ambitious Path

The year 2012 and its past decade stand out as a crucial turning point in the beginning of the BRI. During this period, China found itself facing multifaceted challenges, including territorial and military conflicts in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, coupled with economic competition with the United States, summarized by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations.⁷ These external pressures were compounded by internal issues, such as industrial overcapacity and environmental pollution, which threatened the stability of the domestic economy.

The BRI's global reach is staggering. By mid-2018, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries alone had already witnessed BRI projects valued at over \$739.65 billion,⁸ signaling its profound influence in the region. Furthermore, the BRI's expansion into Africa led to a

² cfr.org

³ Vanderbilt

⁴ cfr.org

⁵ It is a term used to define a creditor nation or establishment extending loans to a borrowing nation in order to expand the lender's political leverage.(thegeopolitics.com)

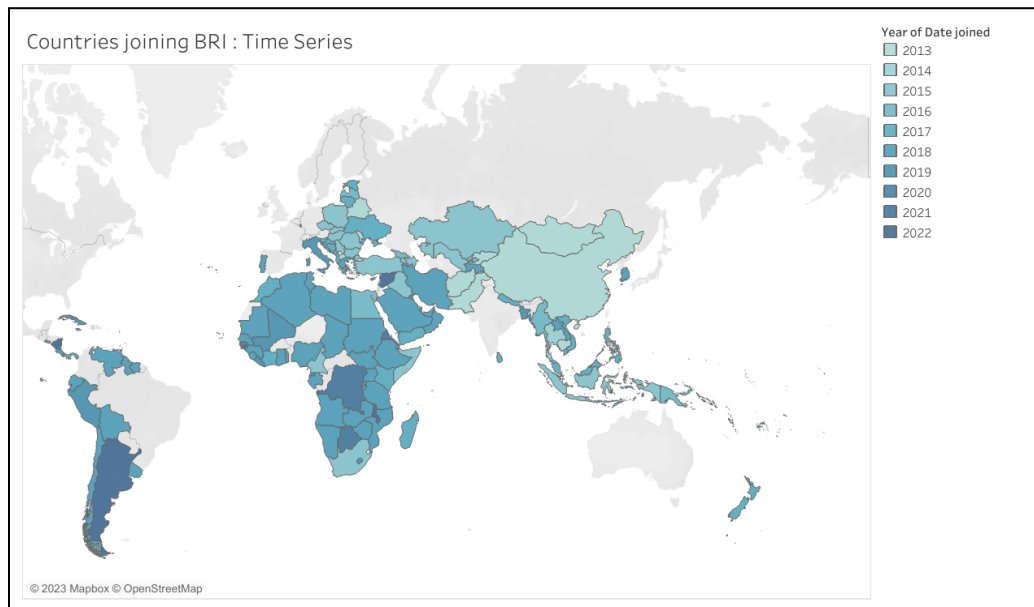
⁶ brookings.edu

⁷ Boston University- Global Development Policy Center

⁸ Vanderbilt

significant tripling of loans from China to African nations between 2012 and 2019, underlining its growing impact on the African continent.⁹ Beyond that, the initiative has even extended its influence into South America, with China signing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with seven countries in the region.

The BRI emerged as a strategic response to these challenges, reflecting a part of China's broader strategic vision, often referred to as "China Goes West."¹⁰ This vision aimed to de-escalate confrontations in maritime Asia by intensifying connectivity across Eurasian land, thereby providing an alternative route to economic expansion and influence. Chinese President Xi Jinping has signaled that the time has come for China to exert its strength and reclaim its historical place on the global stage.



Source: Green Finance and Development Center, Green Belt and Road Initiative, Belt and Road Portal.¹¹

The graph presented in this study provides a visual representation of the expanding partnerships within the BRI over the years. It vividly illustrates the geographical progression of BRI participation, highlighting how the initiative began with the involvement of a limited number of countries and gradually expanded its reach. The graph portrays the early phase of BRI partnerships, primarily concentrated in Asia and a few European countries. Over time, the initiative expanded beyond Asia and Europe, making inroads into the African continent and South America.

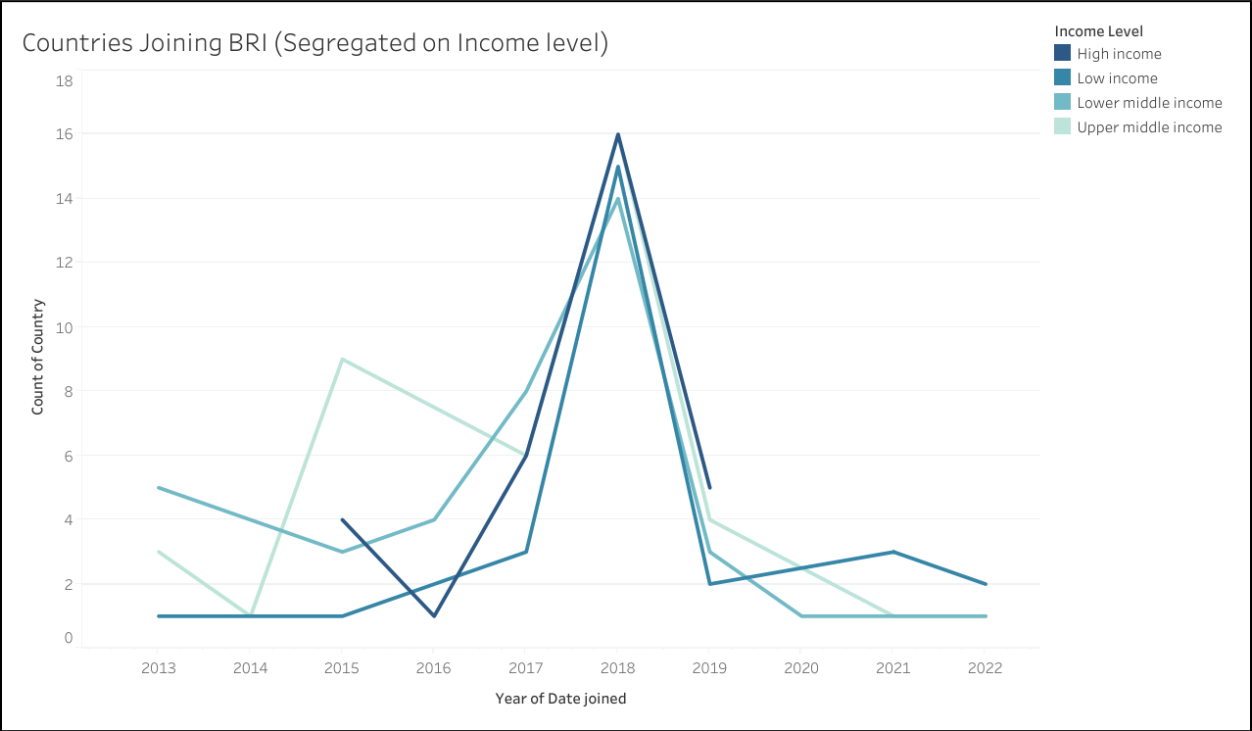
The bar plot presented below portrays the participation of countries within the BRI segmented by income categories. The plot highlights that the early adoption of the BRI was predominantly by

⁹ [vanderbilt](#)

¹⁰ [Boston University- Global Development Policy Center](#)

¹¹ [cfr.org](#)

upper-middle-income countries, with their participation surging in 2015. Conversely, the graph demonstrates a different trend for lower-middle-income, low-income, and high-income countries, with their participation surging in 2018. This indicates that, in contrast to upper-middle-income nations, these countries had a slightly delayed response to the BRI, with the peak of their engagement occurring later. This shift in timing reflects varying economic circumstances, political considerations, and infrastructure development needs across income categories.



Source: Green Finance and Development Center, Green Belt and Road Initiative, Belt and Road Portal.¹²

China's ambitions with the BRI extend beyond economic development. It aims to wield influence through the global supply chain, gain dominance in technology, and position itself at the center of Eurasian trade markets. This will, in turn, lead to unequal market leverage in the region and drive other nations to align with China's interests.

In light of these ambitions, the BRI raises critical questions about China's role in the evolving global order, its influence on international relations, and its impacts on participating nations.

¹² cfr.org

4. Viewing through Indo-Pacific lens

The Indo-Pacific region stands as a crucible of strategic challenges, characterized by contested boundaries and the presence of three major economies—China, India, and Japan—alongside seven of the world's largest military forces. Of particular concern to the United States (US) is the rise of China as a military power, a focal point heightened by the significance of the South China Sea, a vital conduit for a third of global shipping. India, boasting a burgeoning economy and the second-largest military expenditure in the Indo-Pacific, assumes a pivotal role in US efforts to counterbalance China.

What initially garnered warmth as an initiative promising capital and technology to bridge the region's infrastructure gap has transformed. Beyond mere commercial investments, China seems to strategically leverage its financial endeavors for military objectives, as exemplified by the establishment of artificial military bases in the South China Sea. These bases, designed to extend Beijing's offensive capabilities beyond continental shores, notably aim to enhance monitoring of the Strait of Malacca—a critical shipping lane for 80% of China's oil imports. China's strategic maneuvers include alternative routes, such as the Kyaukpyu pipeline connecting to Myanmar, circumventing the Strait of Malacca. Collaborations with Pakistan and Myanmar present alternatives to address China's Malacca Dilemma, with China's economic influence evident in strategic projects such as the Pakistan-China oil pipeline. Southeast Asia, except Singapore, grapples with challenges stemming from a lack of a supportive financial ecosystem for extensive infrastructure projects, coupled with a regional preference for current account surpluses shaped by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

In response to these dynamics, India has expanded alliances and strengthened relations with neighboring allies, extending its geographical reach in the Indian Ocean through territories like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Despite these efforts, historical tensions persist, exacerbated by China's improved ties with Pakistan and its heightened presence in the Indian Ocean, epitomized by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The evolving dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, viewed through the lens of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), raise critical questions about strategic intentions and geopolitical implications for major players in the region.

Initial enthusiasm for the BRI has given way to concerns regarding projects and fears of 'debt trap diplomacy.' This shift is exemplified in the political landscapes of Malaysia and Indonesia. Notably, Chinese capital, particularly infrastructure-related, has become deeply embedded in the political fabric of Southeast Asian host states.

As we look ahead, several implications emerge:

1. Continued Relevance of Chinese Capital:

Chinese capital and infrastructure expertise remain crucial for Southeast Asian economies. The region's persistent infrastructure gaps, tied to financial intermediation limitations and conservative macroeconomic policies, ensure continued demand for Chinese investments and know-how.

2. Attention to Deal Negotiations:

Policymakers need to pay closer attention to how BRI deals are negotiated and implemented. Transparency in these processes is crucial to understanding the involvement of Chinese firms in local and national contexts. Optimism surrounding global cooperation has waned due to factors like public distrust of economic interdependence and geopolitical tensions. However, some Southeast Asian economies have benefited from the relocation of transnational corporations away from China, and Vietnam, showcasing the region's potential.

3. Changing Global Dynamics:

Global cooperation dynamics have shifted, with public skepticism about international economic interdependence and geopolitical tensions between China and the West. Some Southeast Asian economies have benefited from the relocation of transnational corporations (TNCs) from China, but this needs to be carefully managed to avoid negative impacts.

4. BRI 2.0 and Healthy Competition:

China is reevaluating the BRI's impact and considering a BRI 2.0 approach that emphasizes green development, the digital economy, and public health. Healthy competition with alternative infrastructure initiatives like the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and the EU-led Global Gateway projects is expected to enhance project quality and relevance.

5. India's View on BRI

India's perspective on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is characterized by a combination of economic optimism and strategic concerns. The nation's approach to the various aspects of the BRI demonstrates a careful evaluation of both security and economic imperatives. For example, India has shown openness to the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM EC) while strongly opposing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).¹³ The central basis of India's opposition is rooted in concerns over sovereignty, particularly regarding projects that traverse

¹³ [Brill.com](https://www.brill.com)

Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK). Despite this cautious stance, India grapples with a dual imperative, recognizing the need for improved connectivity and infrastructure development, prompting some analysts to explore potential geoeconomic opportunities presented by the BRI.

The core of India's resistance to the BRI is underpinned by several factors. Firstly, deep-seated threat perceptions towards China drive India's opposition, viewing the Indian Ocean and South Asian region as its sphere of influence and interpreting Chinese involvement as unwarranted "intrusions".¹⁴ Secondly, anxiety over the infringement of sovereignty and the expanding Chinese geopolitical influence in its vicinity fuels India's skepticism. Additionally, India harbors reservations about the hidden strategic intentions within the BRI narrative, along with concerns about the potential "debt trap" ensnaring South Asian countries. Despite this resistance, India remains receptive to Chinese investments, as Chinese officials face challenges in conveying distinct advantages over existing economic relations. Overall, India's rejection of the BRI is rooted in threat perceptions, sovereignty concerns, and skepticism about China's strategic intentions.

To counter the Belt and Road Initiative, India can employ a range of strategies. Firstly, the nation can resist the BRI by highlighting the strategic intentions concealed in China's narrative, exposing the potential geopolitical implications. India's objections and threat perceptions have played a crucial role in revealing China's strategic agenda. Secondly, India can counterbalance China's influence by cultivating cooperation with other nations, such as South Korea and Japan, to challenge the expansive scope of China's initiatives. This strategic collaboration extends to initiatives like the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor with Japan and other African countries, embodying a form of balancing in the Balance of Power theory.

Thirdly, India can leverage its strategic partnerships with major powers to strengthen its military capacity and reduce economic dependence on China. The evolution of India's Asia policy aims to establish strategic partnerships with China's key neighbors, Southeast Asian nations, and the Asia-Pacific rim, alongside fostering ties with the United States. This seeks to neutralize Chinese military influence around India and develop countermeasures. India's coordination with the U.S. provides opportunities to enhance its military capabilities with advanced technology, bolstering its power projection capacities. India can further collaborate with the European countries in its own infrastructural and linkage projects.¹⁵ Finally, India can adopt a pragmatic approach, selectively welcoming and increasing Chinese investments while rejecting the BRI for strategic reasons, enabling the nation to maintain control over its economic interests.

In conclusion, India's position on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) embodies a delicate balance between economic pragmatism and strategic interests. The nation skillfully maneuvers through this

¹⁴ [researchgate](#)

¹⁵ [researchgate](#)

intricate terrain by employing a sophisticated approach to various aspects of the BRI, guided by its imperative for security and economic advancement. The strategies delineated, which range from resistance based on strategic considerations to forging alliances with prominent global powers, highlight India's dynamic and evolving response to the Belt and Road Initiative.

6. BRI @ 10: Performance Report

The BRI has made a substantial impact on global development and liquidity finance, addressing the world economy's need to mobilize trillions of dollars annually for shared development and climate goals. China's surge in overseas economic activity has played a pivotal role in this transformation.

1. Increased Scale of Development Finance and Green Energy Financing:

The BRI, coupled with China's expanded overseas financing, has significantly increased the scale of development finance globally. China has become the world's largest source of bilateral development finance, providing multi-billion-dollar commitments to numerous countries.¹⁶ This is crucial for mobilizing resources to achieve shared development objectives and address climate-related challenges. China's overseas financing, a key component of the BRI, has acted as a catalyst for economic growth. It has boosted trade, alleviated infrastructure bottlenecks, and facilitated increased core infrastructure development and energy access in recipient countries. Chinese finance has contributed to a stepwise increase in energy financing across the Global South, emphasizing green energy initiatives. The share of renewable energy finance and investment in total BRI-related financial commitments has steadily risen, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable development. In 2022, Chinese financial institutions committed around \$6 billion¹⁷ to the renewable energy sector, reflecting a growing emphasis on sustainable practices. This aligns with the increasing importance of green development in the BRI's evolving agenda.

2. Trade and Economic Integration:

Ex-ante projections indicate that the BRI has the potential to enhance global trade between 1.7 and 6.2 percent, unlocking 0.7-2.9 percent of global economic growth. Chinese initiatives in over 100 countries have led to the development of low-carbon electricity generation. Transport infrastructure improvements play a crucial role in enhancing total trade. A 10 percent increase in road and rail density could lead to a 0.34 percent and 0.21 percent increase in total trade volume, respectively. These improvements positively impact trade facilitation and efficiency. Over the years, Chinese exports to the

¹⁶ [nature.com](https://www.nature.com)

¹⁷ [Boston University](https://www.boston.edu)

BRI-participating economies have seen a continuous upward trend.¹⁸ The share of BRI-participating economies in Chinese exports reached 34% in 2016, showcasing the growing importance of this region in Chinese export dynamics.

3. Infrastructure development:

The BRI's focus on improving connectivity through infrastructure investment is evident in China's Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) providing \$15 billion in loans for grid construction and upgrades, electricity transmission, and distribution infrastructure. Investments in modern and smart grid infrastructure enhance the integration of renewable energy sources. Additionally, the BRI has supported infrastructure projects in countries such as Indonesia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, although the implementation of these projects has faced challenges.¹⁹ In Africa, the BRI overlaps with the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), which aims to develop transportation, energy, and communication infrastructure for regional integration.

4. Geopolitical Impact:

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has significant geopolitical implications. It aims to dominate the Eurasian continent and Indo-Pacific waterways through economic tools and infrastructure projects, aligning with the theories of Mackinder and Mahan.²⁰ The development of Gwadar port under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a crucial part of the BRI, providing economic security outcomes for China and Pakistan. It offers China an alternate, secure route for oil supply and goods export, as well as better access to markets in Central Asia, Europe, and the USA. For Pakistan, Gwadar Port enhances maritime trade capacity and naval security by reducing reliance on existing ports near the Indian border. Concerns about the environmental impacts of the BRI are legitimate, and planning for these impacts is complex. The BRI has also had political impacts, potentially diminishing democratic freedoms and labor rights in countries involved in BRI projects.²¹ The BRI will have a multifaceted impact on the European Union, affecting bilateral relations with China, the European Neighbourhood Policy, and requiring a comprehensive approach to engagement beyond traditional diplomacy.

5. Technology and Innovation Transfer:

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has had an impact on technology and innovation transfer. BRI projects in Africa have brought advanced construction technologies and methods, but the transfer of

¹⁸ [Boston University](#)

¹⁹ [Science Direct](#)

²⁰ [Taylor & Francis | Online](#)

²¹ [Democracy and Human Rights in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative \(springer.com\)](#)

technological capability from Chinese construction firms to host countries is not fully realized.²² Technology is seen as a tool to enhance environmental sustainability and mitigate climate impacts in BRI projects. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) through BRI has the potential to promote domestic innovation capability in emerging markets, with spillover effects occurring through channels such as reverse engineering and skilled labor turnovers. BRI has also facilitated financial technology (Fintech) services, such as the BRISPOT application, which has been accepted and used by marketers in BRI Kanca Karawang.²³ Overall, BRI has the potential to promote technology and innovation transfer through infrastructure development, FDI, and Fintech services.

6. Diplomacy:

Diplomacy and agreements in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have evolved. The BRI has led to the promotion of regional cooperation, stability, and constructive diplomatic relations through Heritage Diplomacy (HD) practices, such as assisting in cultural heritage protection and technology transfer. Additionally, the BRI has highlighted the importance of high-quality infrastructure investment (QII) principles,²⁴ which have been promoted by Japan and endorsed by China. The BRI has also emphasized international cooperation in the health sector, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing China's farsighted and strategic health diplomacy. However, the complexity of diplomatic agreements in the BRI has made it challenging to find a universal formula that works for all situations and agreements. However, the recent development in Italy paints a different picture regarding this aspect of diplomacy and strategic influence in European countries. Italy joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2019, becoming the first Group of Seven (G7) country to do so. However, with its five-year memorandum of understanding up for renewal in March 2024, Italy appears poised to withdraw from the BRI, a reflection of frustrations with the initiative's unmet promises and the country's strategic reassessment of China.²⁵ However, the complexity of diplomatic agreements in the BRI has made it challenging to find a universal formula that works for all situations and agreements.

The BRI's decade-long performance, as outlined in the report, underscores its role in shaping global development, fostering economic growth, and promoting sustainable practices. China's commitment to green finance, infrastructure connectivity, and trade facilitation positions the BRI as a key player in the evolving landscape of international cooperation.

²² mdpi.com

²³ journal.ipb.ac.id

²⁴ swp-berlin.com

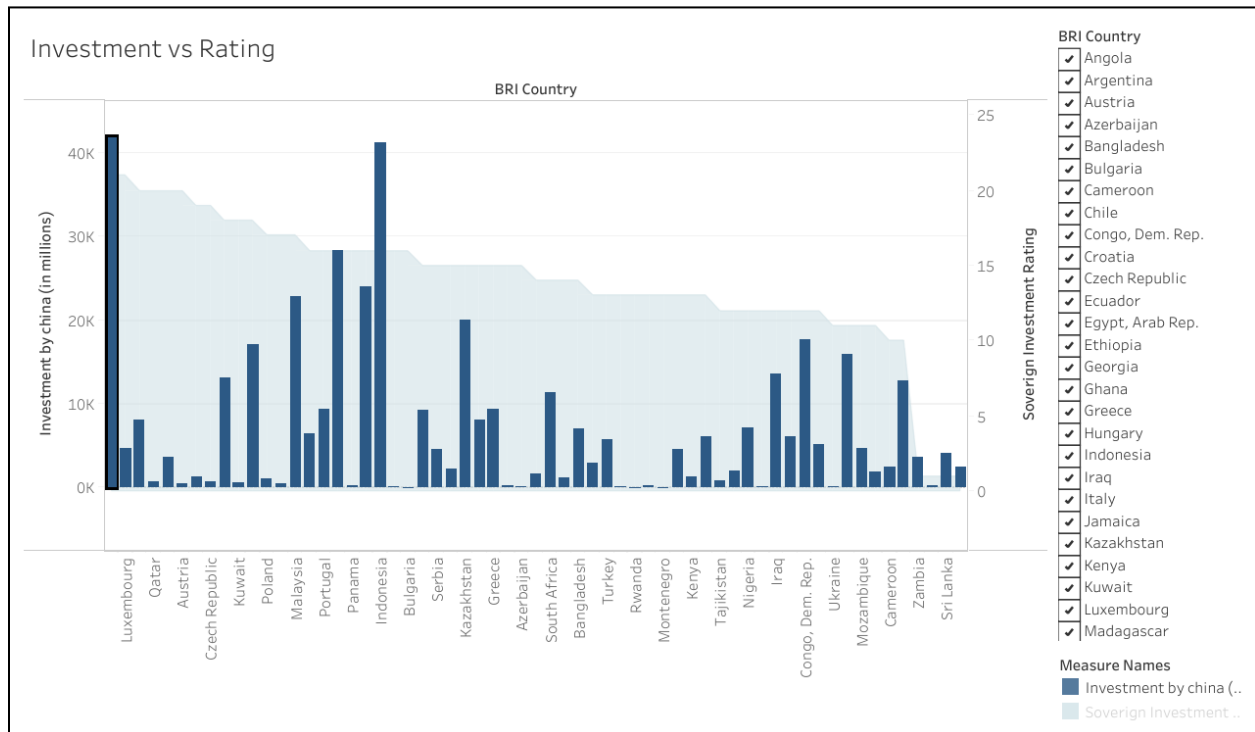
²⁵ cfr.org

7. China's Economic Concerns

The economic dimension of China's BRI presents a set of challenges that have begun to cast a shadow over the initiative's grand ambitions. As we delve into the economic concerns, it is evident that the BRI's vast infrastructure investments and lending practices have triggered a wave of apprehensions, both domestically and globally.

1. Debt Problems and Delayed Projects

One of the most prominent concerns surrounding the BRI relates to the debt problems associated with its projects. Flagship BRI investments have faced delays or cancellations, leading to increased scrutiny of Chinese lending practices. The issue of debt servicing and allegations of corruption have further added to the unease. The United States, in particular, has grown more vocal in expressing its worries about the financial aspects of the project. These challenges have been highlighted in a report by The Economist Intelligence Unit. A study conducted by the Center for Global Development has identified eight countries at particular risk of debt distress due to the pipeline of project lending associated with the BRI. This revelation underscores the vulnerability of certain nations that have embraced BRI-related projects without fully comprehending the long-term financial implications. As these countries grapple with mounting debt, the sustainability of their BRI commitments comes under scrutiny.



Source: S&P Sovereign Investment Rating. AAA and Aaa are given a score of 21; AA+ and Aa1 are given a score of 20, and so on, down to 3 for D and C at the junk end. The investment grade ends at BBB-/Baa3 at a score of 13.²⁶

The provided graphic offers a thorough examination of sovereign credit ratings and China's investments in various economies. The light blue section represents sovereign credit ratings, derived from Moody's and S&P/Fitch scores. The vertical axis indicates China's investments in construction projects within each economy. Notably, 24 economies boast an investment grade of BBB- or higher, with a corresponding score of at least 12. Conversely, 37 economies fall below the investment grade threshold. Economies rated below investment grade have collectively received around USD 171 billion in cumulative investment, constituting approximately 34% of the total investments since 2005. This raises concerns about the viability of projects in these economies and prompts a crucial question about their prospects. The uncertainty surrounding the success of investments in below-investment-grade economies emphasizes the need to closely monitor outcomes and performance.

2. Pushback and Renegotiations

In its second phase, the BRI is encountering growing resistance from various countries, including Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Zambia, and Pakistan. These nations have begun to reassess their involvement in BRI projects due to mounting concerns. For instance, Malaysia initially canceled a rail link that was part of the BRI, a decision that resonated with several other countries contemplating similar actions. Myanmar has downsized a BRI-related port project, from \$7.5 billion to \$1.3 billion, recognizing the importance of aligning infrastructure development with actual demand.²⁷

3. Lessons from Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port

Sri Lanka's Hambantota port serves as an early cautionary tale of how poorly planned BRI projects can backfire. Unable to service debts exceeding \$8 billion owed to Chinese firms involved in the port's construction, Sri Lanka handed over the port to China on a 99-year lease in December 2017.²⁸ While this move alleviated some of Sri Lanka's debt burden, it also served as a stark reminder to other nations of the potential financial risks associated with BRI projects and their impact on sovereignty.

4. Economic Leverage and Implications for Sovereignty

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship BRI project, is of critical strategic importance to China's outreach to the Indian Ocean. This project aims to connect China's western provinces to the Arabian Sea through extensive infrastructure development. However, the terms of the

²⁶ [Home | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/)

²⁷ [Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press](#)

²⁸ [Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press](#)

lease and revenue-sharing arrangements have raised questions about economic leverage and the potential dual use of strategic assets. Pakistan's economic entanglement with China, exacerbated by its separation from previous U.S. economic support, has altered the dynamics of influence in the region. These developments have also left Pakistan facing unfavorable loan conditions and challenges in capitalizing on the economic potential associated with port activities.

As the BRI enters its second decade, it becomes imperative to address these economic concerns, striking a balance between infrastructure development and fiscal responsibility to ensure that participating nations reap the intended benefits without succumbing to unsustainable debt and financial risks.

7. Exploring Global Alternatives to BRI

As China's BRI continues to evolve, several countries and regions are actively pursuing alternative geo-economic strategies. These alternatives aim to create a more balanced and competitive global landscape, countering China's expanding influence.

1. Japan's Quality Infrastructure Plan and Economic Activism

Japan has emerged as a prominent rival to China's BRI through its alternative quality infrastructure plan. The Japanese government has committed to investing a substantial \$200 billion in infrastructure projects across several countries that were expected participants in the BRI.²⁹ Additionally, Japan and India have jointly launched the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor, a framework designed to enhance economic connections between Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Japan's proactive approach extends to Eastern Europe, where it seeks to counterbalance China's economic activism. Tokyo's interest also encompasses bolstering military activities in the Indian Ocean, and leading infrastructure projects in regions like Africa, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. This proactive stance by Japan exemplifies an effort to challenge China's BRI and diversify economic connectivity on a global scale. It has strengthened economic ties with China, advocated for increased U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and welcomed security partnerships like AUKUS. Japan's endeavors to promote its connectivity initiative are partly in response to China's BRI and align with its broader strategic goals.

2. India's International North-South Transportation Corridor

India's International North-South Transportation Corridor offers an additional alternative to the BRI. This corridor aims to connect the Indian Ocean economic zone with Europe through the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, strategically involving China's economic allies, Iran and Russia. This initiative has

²⁹ academic.oup.com

received further momentum through New Delhi's Arabian-Mediterranean Corridor, which connects the subcontinent to Europe via opportunities stemming from the normalization of relations between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel.³⁰ India's Arab-Med Corridor seeks to establish a multi-modal commercial connectivity arc that spans from India's Arabian Sea coast to Greece's eastern Mediterranean coast. This development holds significant geopolitical implications, potentially reshaping India's role in the Eurasian economic order.

3. Russia's Economic Community of States

This community overlaps with the BRI at crucial junctures and in essential spatial locations, underscoring the competition and diverse strategies unfolding in Eurasia. By fostering economic collaboration within this community, Russia asserts itself as an influential player in the Eurasian economic landscape, challenging China's dominant position and offering alternative pathways to regional development.

4. European Union's Eurasian Connectivity Initiatives

The European Union (EU) has been actively developing plans for Eurasian connectivity, encompassing the Middle East and continental Asia. The EU's interest in building Eurasian networks began with initiatives like the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), reflecting modest ambitions. Building on this foundation, the EU launched the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy in 2018, encompassing various modes of transport and communication networks across Eurasian economies. A more significant undertaking is the EU's Global Gateway strategy, launched with a substantial investment of €300 billion.³¹ This roadmap for global infrastructure investment is the EU's response to China's expanding presence, emphasizing European values as a driving force. It seeks to provide an alternative to the BRI and promote sustainable and efficient access across Eurasian regions, further intensifying the global competition for geo-economic influence.

As the world continues to adapt to evolving power dynamics, these alternatives have the potential to reshape the global geopolitical landscape, creating a more balanced and competitive environment. Understanding these alternatives is essential for a comprehensive assessment of the BRI's impact and the broader geopolitical contest.

8. Challenges Ahead

³⁰ ndupress.ndu.edu

³¹ ndupress.ndu.edu

While the BRI has undeniably reshaped the global economic and geopolitical landscape, it has also raised several pressing issues that demand critical attention. This section explores the challenges and drawbacks that loom on the horizon, casting a shadow over the otherwise transformative initiative.

1. Geopolitical Expansion and Military Presence

One growing concern, especially voiced by the United States, revolves around the potential utilization of the BRI as a means to extend China's military presence beyond permissible limits. The initiative's vast network of infrastructure projects and economic connections could potentially serve as a vehicle for projecting military influence, thereby altering the geopolitical dynamics of various regions. As the BRI continues to expand, it is essential to scrutinize its impact on global security and power balance.³²

2. Human Rights Violations

There is an apparent disregard for human rights in certain regions, particularly exemplified in Xinjiang, China, and Kazakhstan. Reports indicate that Xinjiang authorities have implemented reeducation programs and anti-Islamic measures targeted at minority groups, such as the Uighurs.³³ This troubling development has raised concerns about the human rights implications of the BRI, as it directly impacts the well-being of vulnerable communities. The geopolitical significance of Xinjiang further underscores China's motives in the region.

3. Media Influence and Censorship

The BRI has also been linked to the spread of Chinese media influence and censorship, veiled as "public opinion guidance." At least thirty-six countries have received instruction aimed at promoting the Chinese vision of media, often leading to increased censorship practices. The lack of transparency surrounding these training seminars raises questions about the potential erosion of free speech and independent media in recipient countries. The BRI's influence on media and information flow has far-reaching consequences for political freedom and democratic values.

4. Digital Silk Road and Surveillance Concerns

The Digital Silk Road, a subproject of the BRI focusing on internet infrastructure, has introduced new challenges to the initiative. Instances like the partnership between the Venezuelan government and a Chinese telecommunications company, which could enable extensive citizen surveillance, have raised serious privacy and human rights concerns. The use of technology to track citizens and stifle dissenting views highlights the broader implications of the BRI on individual liberties and state control.

³² wharton.upenn.edu

³³ vanderbilt

5. Debt-Trap Diplomacy and Sovereignty Erosion

Debt-trap diplomacy, a term closely associated with the BRI, has come under scrutiny. It refers to the CCP's use of unsustainable loans to gain control of foreign assets, unrestricted military access, and international support for regional issues.³⁴ While these loans may initially appear beneficial, they erode national sovereignty, foster corruption, and limit a country's ability to resist external political pressure. This practice effectively locks countries into a cycle of financial obligations that successive governments must grapple with.

6. Complex Lending Practices and Transparency Issues

BRI lending practices have been criticized for their complexity, often leaving target countries with limited technical expertise to evaluate project contract conditions. These loans operate outside the standard international monetary system, making it challenging for affected nations to seek recourse in case of disputes. The lack of regulative oversight and transparency creates conditions ripe for inefficiency, especially in countries with high levels of internal corruption.

9. **Way Forward**

China's BRI has stirred global conversations on connectivity, development, and the redefinition of international roles. The multi-dimensional landscape of the BRI necessitates a collaborative approach, involving various nations to shape its course. Here's a perspective on the way forward based on the provided data:

1. Need for Stable Institutions and Building Sustainable Relationships: A crucial factor for BRI success is the presence of stable institutions supporting projects in beneficiary countries. Stable institutions provide the foundation necessary for effective project implementation, ensuring long-term benefits. The end goal of connectivity projects, including the BRI, should be building sustainable relationships based on mutual understanding. Cooperation for economic prosperity contributes to global peace, fostering a future where States cooperate despite differences.
2. India's Approach: India's response to the BRI reflects an atomistic and pragmatic approach, considering its economic and strategic needs. While being vigilant about national security, India can leverage China's investment and technological prowess to complement its human resources and economic development. The growing synergy in India-US ties presents an opportunity to foster infrastructural growth in the region. Trilateral initiatives, such as those focusing on clean energy, electrification, and women-owned businesses, contribute to economic development and counterbalance China's influence. India should actively engage with debt relief measures proposed for

³⁴ vanderbilt.edu

BRI participant countries, emphasizing the importance of debt restructuring and forgiveness. This not only safeguards the financial stability of partner nations but also positions India as a responsible player in the global economic landscape. Moreover, India must leverage alternative initiatives and partnerships, such as the G20's Infrastructure Initiative and the EU's Global Gateway Plan. By actively participating in these frameworks, India can diversify its infrastructure development options and reduce dependency on the BRI. Furthermore, Privatisation emerges as a key strategy for India to enhance its regional and global influence. Leveraging the private sector creates a competitive environment, ensuring transparency, strict regulations, and timely project deliveries. This approach aligns with the changing landscape of domestic undertakings and infrastructure projects.

3. India should strengthen Regional Collaborations: India should actively engage with regional partners, especially within the Quad framework and G20 countries, to collectively formulate and implement alternative connectivity projects in the Indian Ocean region. Collaborative efforts can counterbalance the influence of the BRI, providing a viable alternative to the Western-dominated economic order. The recently launched India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and initiatives under the 'Act East,' 'Neighbourhood First,' and 'Go West' policies demonstrate India's commitment to regional connectivity.³⁵
4. India should look to improve Maritime Security and Infrastructure: Considering the concerns surrounding the aspects of the BRI especially related to the Gwadar port India needs to strengthen its capabilities, in security.³⁶ This not only involves protecting its interests but also contributing to maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean region. By investing in infrastructure and collaborating with minded nations India can effectively counter any potential shifts in power in the region ensuring a robust presence and influence.
5. India to increase engagement in Regional Forums: India should actively engage in forums such as BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Technical and Economic Cooperation) to enhance connectivity and promote infrastructure development. Leveraging its role within BIMSTEC India can foster collaboration with neighboring countries.³⁷ Work towards shared goals. The connectivity initiatives within BIMSTEC have the potential to become a foundation for cooperation offering an approach to China's regional involvement.

³⁵ mea.gov.in

³⁶ [Maritime India](#)

³⁷ [Carnegie India](#)

6. Creating a Cohesive Plan for Connectivity Initiatives: India must develop a defined roadmap for its connectivity initiatives by identifying projects, mechanisms, and objectives. This entails bringing together ad initiatives, into a comprehensive strategy that focuses on regional connectivity and infrastructure development. Working together with nations such, as Australia, France, Germany, the UK, and the United States can provide India with knowledge and resources enabling it to assume a prominent position in the region. Crafting a comprehensive strategy will not only cater to India's domestic development requirements but also present a viable option for China's endeavors, in the area.
7. Global Cooperation and Mutual Accommodation: The BRI, despite its origins in China, requires the willing participation of multiple nations. As several countries seek new roles in international affairs, including Japan, Korea, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia, a paradigm of mutual accommodation, engagement, consultation, and consensus-building is crucial for its success. As major players in Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, China and India are likely to have both competitive and convergent interests. Enhancing cooperation while addressing areas of dispute is a principal challenge. A fresh look at India's approach to the BRI can open avenues for mutual benefit and shared regional development.

10. Conclusion

The BRI has commendably steered international discourse away from conflict, emphasizing connectivity for mutual prosperity. Economic growth, a harbinger of peace, forms the underlying message of connectivity projects, including the BRI. States, even when disagreements persist, should cooperate based on mutual understanding, building sustainable relationships. The global stage is large enough for both China and India, with a shared vision of a peaceful and stable future in a pluralistic world.

In the best interest of both nations, seeking a multipolar world through the alignment of respective interests is a viable path forward. Asia's pluralistic nature has historically allowed cooperative and beneficial exchanges despite differences. A shared commitment to economic growth and development lays the foundation for a peaceful coexistence, exemplifying the potential of a collaborative and prosperous future. The evolving narrative around the BRI provides an opportunity for nations to shift from conflict to connectivity. The shared vision of a peaceful and stable future, emphasizing cooperation, mutual understanding, and economic growth, is a plausible pathway for a harmonious global order. In this context, India and China can contribute significantly to a multipolar world by aligning their interests and fostering a true Asian Age of cooperation and prosperity.

11. References

1. 'Belt and Road Initiative: Geo-Economics and Indo-Pacific Security Competition | International Affairs | Oxford Academic'. Accessed 23 November 2023.
<https://academic.oup.com/ia/article-abstract/96/1/169/5697484?login=false>.
2. 'China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative | Council on Foreign Relations'. Accessed 23 November 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.
3. 'India's Approach to China's Belt and Road Initiative—Opportunities and Concerns in: The Chinese Journal of Global Governance Volume 5 Issue 2 (2019)'. Accessed 23 November 2023.
https://brill.com/view/journals/cjgg/5/2/article-p136_3.xml?language=en.
4. 'Ten Years of the Belt and Road: Reflections and Recent Trends | Global Development Policy Center'. Accessed 23 November 2023.
<https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2022/09/06/ten-years-of-the-belt-and-road-reflections-and-recent-trend/s/>.
5. East Asia Forum. 'India Pushes Back against China's Economic Influence', 9 September 2023.
<https://www.easiaforum.org/2023/09/09/india-pushes-back-against-chinas-economic-influence/>.
6. Fernanda, FARINHA. 'Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major Players' Strategic Perspectives', n.d.
7. GCI-Report-BRI-10-FIN.pdf (bu.edu)
8. Gurpreet, S., Khurana. (2019). India as a Challenge to China's Belt and Road Initiative. *Asia Policy*, 26(2), 27-33. doi: 10.1353/ASP.2019.0027
9. Kishan, S., Rana. (2020). Conclusion: An Indian Perspective on the Belt and Road Initiative. 203-228. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-44425-9_11
10. Knowledge at Wharton. 'China's Belt and Road Initiative: Why the Price Is Too High'. Accessed 6 November 2023.
<https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/podcast/knowledge-at-wharton-podcast/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-why-the-price-is-too-high/>.
11. Kumar, S Y Surendra. 'China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): India's Concerns, Responses and Strategies'. *International Journal of China Studies* 10 (1 June 2019): 27–45.

12. Mala, Sharma. (2019). India's Approach to China's Belt and Road Initiative—Opportunities and Concerns. *The Chinese Journal of Global Governance*, 5(2), 136-152. doi: 10.1163/23525207-12340041
13. Manasi, Singh. (2021). India, Europe and Connectivity: From Shared Views on BRI to Mutual Cooperation?. doi: 10.1007/978-981-33-4608-6_6
14. Rajesh, Basrur. (2019). The BRI and India's Grand Strategy. *Strategic Analysis*, doi: 10.1080/09700161.2019.1598082
15. Salamatin, Mikaela. 'China's Belt and Road Initiative Is Reshaping Human Rights Norms', n.d.
16. Srikanth, Thaliyakkattil. (2019). India as Jealous Foe and the BRI. doi: 10.1007/978-981-13-8425-7_6
17. Srikanth, Thaliyakkattil. (2019). India May Join and Benefit from the BRI: A Chinese View. doi: 10.1007/978-981-13-8425-7_4
18. The Wire. 'Why India Needs to Take a Fresh Look at China's Belt and Road Initiative'. Accessed 23 November 2023. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-needs-to-take-a-fresh-look-at-the-belt-and-road-initiative-prop-osa>
19. Vision, CGCC. "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Indo-Pacific Strategy": New Dynamics of Regional Cooperation'. HKTDC Research. Accessed 23 November 2023. <https://research.hktdc.com/en/article/MzY0Nzc3ODAx>.